

# What does a Veterinary Technician Do?

- Obtains and records patient case histories
- Collects specimens and performs laboratory procedures
- Provides specialized nursing care
- Prepares animals, instruments, and equipment for surgery
- Assists in diagnostic, medical, and surgical procedures
- Exposes and develops radiographs (xrays)
- Advises and educates animal owners
- Supervises and trains practice personnel
- Performs dental prophylaxes
- Supervises the humane care and handling of research animals
- Assists in the implementation of research projects

The veterinary technician is an integral member of the veterinary health care team. Veterinary technicians have been educated in the care and handling of animals, the basic principles of normal and abnormal life processes, and in routine laboratory and clinical procedures. All veterinary technicians work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. While a veterinary technician can assist in performing a wide variety of tasks, they cannot diagnose, prescribe, perform surgery, or engage in any activity prohibited by a state's veterinary practice act.

## Resources for more information

### Mission Statement

The mission of the AVMA is to improve animal and human health and advance the veterinary medical profession.

American Veterinary Medical Association  
(AVMA)  
[www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org)

National Association of  
Veterinary Technicians in America  
(NAVTA)  
[www.navta.net](http://www.navta.net)

Veterinary Hospital Managers Association  
(VHMA)  
[www.vhma.org](http://www.vhma.org)

Canadian Association of Animal Health  
Technologists and Technicians (CAAHTT)  
[www.caahtt-acttsa.ca](http://www.caahtt-acttsa.ca)



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# Veterinary Technicians

*partnering in animal health*



AVMA Veterinary Career Series

In recent years, the profession of veterinary medicine has become ever more sophisticated and complex. The public expects state-of-the-art veterinary care for animals. To provide high quality service, today's veterinary team utilizes the skills of trained professionals known as *veterinary technicians*.

If you care about animals, enjoy working with your hands, are good at basic math and decision-making, and like working with people and handling a variety of responsibilities, then the challenging career of veterinary technology may be just right for you.

## Duties and Responsibilities

The veterinary technician is an integral member of the veterinary health care team. Veterinary technicians have been educated in the care and handling of animals, the basic principles of normal and abnormal life processes, and in many laboratory and clinical procedures. All veterinary technicians work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. While a veterinary technician can assist in performing a wide variety of tasks, they cannot diagnose, prescribe, perform surgery, or engage in any activity prohibited by a state's veterinary practice act.

## In Private Practice

A veterinary technician employed in a veterinary clinic or hospital handles many of the same responsibilities that nurses and other professionals perform for physicians. They are trained to:

- Obtain and record patient case histories
- Collect specimens and perform laboratory procedures
- Provide specialized nursing care
- Prepare animals, instruments, and equipment for surgery
- Assist in diagnostic, medical, and surgical procedures
- Expose and develop radiographs (x-rays)
- Advise and educate animal owners
- Supervise and train practice personnel
- Perform dental prophylaxes

## In Biomedical Research

In addition to the responsibilities above, veterinary technicians employed in a biomedical research facility perform other duties under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian, a biomedical research worker, or other scientist:

- Supervise the humane care and handling of research animals
- Assist in the implementation of research projects

## Career Opportunities

While the majority of veterinary technicians are employed in private practice, the demand for technicians is rapidly expanding to include new employment opportunities in human and animal health-related areas and specialties such as:

|                               |                                               |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Biomedical research           | Veterinary supply sales                       |
| Military service              | Animal control and humane society animal care |
| Food safety inspection        | Drug and feed company                         |
| Teaching                      | technical service and sales                   |
| Zoo animal and wildlife care  |                                               |
| Diagnostic laboratory support |                                               |

## Education

Students interested in a career in veterinary technology should have an aptitude for general science, math and biology and demonstrate basic language and communication skills.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredits veterinary technology programs throughout the United States and Canada. Most AVMA-accredited programs lead to an Associate degree after two years but some lead to a four-year Baccalaureate degree. Technicians with Baccalaureate degrees usually receive higher salaries and greater level of job responsibilities.

A period of clinical experience in a veterinary practice is required for all students in an AVMA-accredited veterinary technology program. This period of hands-on training is called a *preceptorship*, *practicum*, or *externship* and is a critical component of the veterinary technology program.

## Distance Learning

To accommodate work and family obligations, distance learning is an option for many students wishing to earn a degree in veterinary technology from home. The AVMA accredits several distance-learning courses that meet the same standards of accreditation as traditional programs and include a clinical component. Students fulfill the clinical training through sponsorship by a licensed veterinarian.

## Salary

Veterinary technicians earn salaries that compare favorably to those in other fields requiring a similar education. Salaries vary according to experience, responsibility, geographic location, and employment type.

## Professional Regulation

The majority of states have regulations that provide for technician credentialing (certification, licensure, or registration). Candidates are typically tested for competency through an examination regulated by the state board of veterinary medical examiners. Most states require candidates to pass the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE) before being issued a license to practice.

## Veterinary Technician Specialties

Some veterinary technicians decide to specialize in a certain area. According to the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA), an Academy is a group of veterinary technicians who have received formal, specialized training, testing and certification in an area. The recognized academies include specialties in dental technology, anesthesia, internal medicine, emergency and critical care, behavior, zoological medicine, and equine veterinary nursing.

NAVTA defines a Society as a group of veterinary technicians who represent a distinct and identifiable specialty, supported by a veterinary specialty. Members may or may not have received formal training and may or may not be certified in that specialty. Members of a Society may go on to become members of an Academy if they meet the requirements of the Academy. NAVTA currently recognizes veterinary technician societies specializing in the fields of behavior, equine veterinary technology, zoo veterinary technology, and emergency and critical care.

Visit the NAVTA site ([www.navta.net](http://www.navta.net)) for a complete list of veterinary technician Academies and Societies.

## Continuing Education

Many state licensing boards require a certain number of hours of continuing education (CE) to renew professional licenses. In addition, with ongoing advances in technology and treatments, most veterinary technicians find it important to continue taking advantage of educational opportunities to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date.

## Veterinary Technician Associations

About 100 state, local, and provincial organizations of veterinary technicians exist across the United States and Canada. NAVTA offers its members continuing education, as well as social and employment-related activities to assist in their professional growth. For specifics on Canadian veterinary technology programs, contact the Canadian Association of Animal Health Technologists and Technicians (CAAHTT) (see "For More Information").

